

Technical Writing for Non-Writers

FOSDEM

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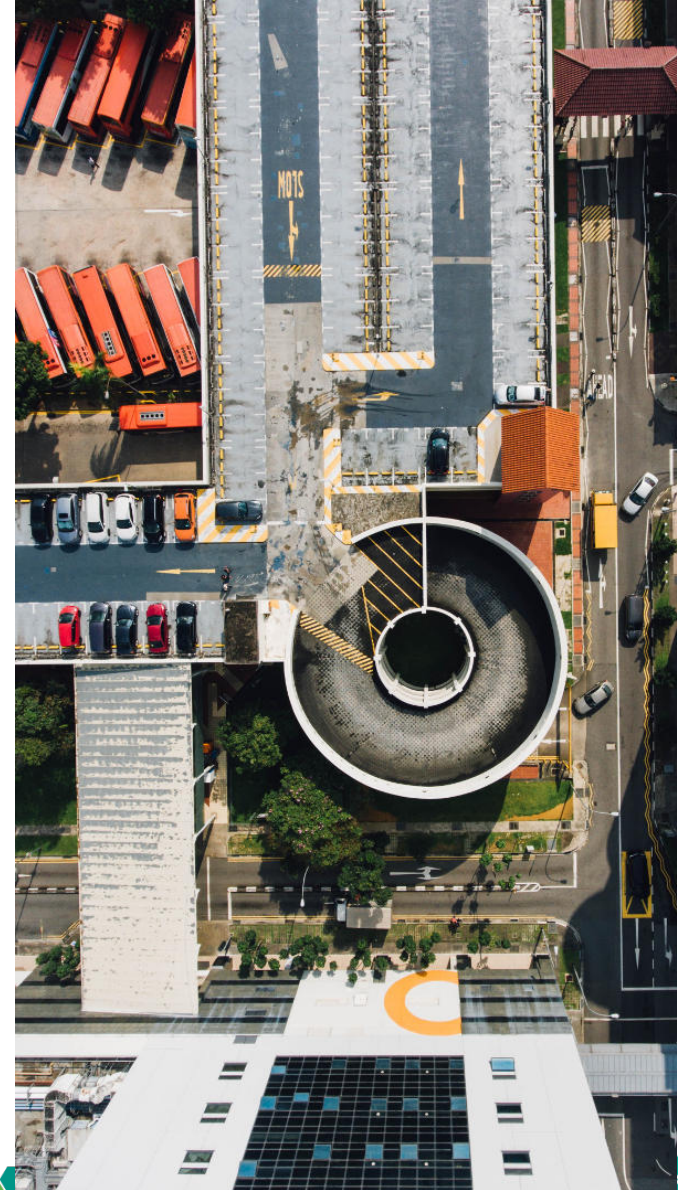
Overview

Warm-up

5 Basic Rules

Questions & Answers

Sources



5 Basic Rules

#1: Change Perspective

“Don't tell me how it works ...



... tell me how to *use* it!”



#2: Obey the KISS-Principle

words

“utilize” → “use”

“indicate” → “show”, “tell”, “say”

“prerequisite” → “requirement”

grammar

“Click *OK*. The *Printer Options* dialog appears.”

sentences

one idea, one sentence

fillers

“already existing”, “completely new”, “simply”



#3: Split Into Chunks

complex information

split into chunks

first things first: what everyone needs to know

3-level hierarchy: 1. – 1.1 – 1.1.1

Miller's Law: 7 ± 2 items (procedure: < 10 steps)

structure

does it reflect your *readers'* goals?

form follows function

- instructions: active voice, procedure with steps
- warning: *before* procedure/step
- background, concepts: *before* procedure



#4: Be Consistent

choice of words

“symbolic link” – “softlink” – “symlink”

spelling

“add-on” – “addon” – “add on”

parallel constructions

“Why white space is important:

- ~~Attention focus~~
- ~~It visually separates sections.~~
- ~~Breaking content into chunks”~~



#5: Avoid Interruptions

long commands, particles

“however”, “nevertheless”, “therefore”,
“for example”, “if necessary”...

“They are not, however, marked as installed.”
“However, they are not marked as installed.”

phrasal verbs

“Shut the server down.”
“Shut down the server.”



Q & A Session

Sources



Comprehensive list of sources: <https://git.io/fosdem-tw-src>

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